

Aladdin *Angelwings* No. 11

*Why is Nick
always making
things up?*

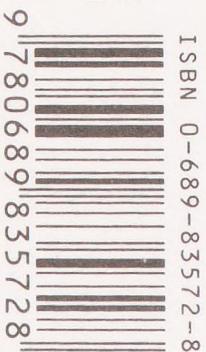
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WITH
"OTHER"
SERIES

HER SERIES
ADDIN
GELWINGS

Now-It-All
onna Jo Napoli

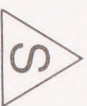
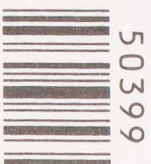
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A great adventure

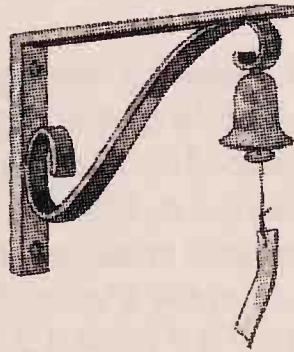
"I have a task for you," said the Archangel of Learning. "And, little angel, I think this will be the task you earn your wings with."

"Really?" The Little Angel of Learning had only a few feathers on each wing at this point, because his previous tasks had been pretty easy for him. After all, he approached each task in a thoroughly logical way. He would first read all about the child's problem and then he would do whatever the experts recommended. But easy tasks were worth only a feather or two. This task must be really hard if it would earn him the rest of his feathers.

His wings. What a great adventure flying would be.

Aladdin
Angelwings
No. 11

Know-It-All



Donna Jo Napoli

illustrations by Lauren Klementz-Harte

Aladdin Paperbacks

New York London Toronto Sydney Singapore

*Thank you to all my family,
Brenda Bowen, Cylin Busby, Noëlle Paffett-Lugassy,
Karen Riskin, and Richard Tchen*

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

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For all of you who make things up



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Aladdin
Angelwings
No. 11

Know-It-All

Angel Talk

The Little Angel of Learning shut his book and prepared to stretch. First he put his feet together, pointing straight ahead with the inner sides touching as much as possible. Then he stood tall, his neck long, his shoulders wide but relaxed. He thought of his spine as a column that went down through the ground and up into the sky forever. He was like a mountain. Yes, he was ready.

He closed his eyes and dropped his head forward, feeling its full weight. Very slowly he rolled it to the right, and around to the back, and on to the left, and around to the front again.

A warm breath lightly touched the back of his neck.



The little angel looked up. "Oh, hi."

The Archangel of Learning smiled. "Can I join you?"

"Of course."

And so the little angel and archangel stretched their necks and arms and legs and torsos in all different positions. Finally, they lay down beside one another and breathed softly.

After a long while, the archangel took a deep breath and blew it out through his mouth. And another. The little angel did the same.

"I can see you've been practicing yoga a lot since the last time we did this," said the archangel. "It's a pleasure to do the poses with you."

"The *asanas*," said the Little Angel of Learning. "*Asana* is Sanskrit for 'pose.'"

"Hmmm. Did you think I didn't know that?"

"No. I knew you knew it." The little angel wriggled in pleasure. "I just wanted you to

know I knew it, too. I'm so glad you're teaching me yoga. I love it. I read everything I can find about it."

The Archangel of Learning rolled onto his right side and pushed himself up to a sitting position. Then he crossed his legs, yogi style, and faced the little angel. "I have a task for you."

The little angel jumped up. "Yay."

"Wait a minute. You know the proper way to rise from a supine *asana*."

"*Supine* means 'on your back,'" said the little angel. "And yes, I know, but I was in a hurry."

"Take enough time to do things right," said the Archangel of Learning. "Otherwise you just might waste your time."

The little angel flushed.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scold you so harshly. And I am glad you're so eager for the task."

The little angel sat down in front of the

archangel. "Tell me about the child I'm going to help."

"He's a tough nut to crack, all right," said the archangel.

"What's that mean?"

The archangel laughed. "You know what *supine* means and you even know the Sanskrit word *asana*, but you don't know what a tough nut to crack is. Well, you're about to find out. And, little angel, I think this will be the task you earn your wings with."

"Really?" The Little Angel of Learning had only a few feathers on each wing at this point, because his previous tasks had been pretty easy for him. After all, he approached each task in a thoroughly logical way. He would first read all about the child's problem and then he would do whatever the experts recommended. But easy tasks were worth only a feather or two. This task must be really hard if it would earn him the rest of his feathers.

His wings. What a great adventure flying

would be. He had been reading a book about birds that described the acrobatics of the golden eagle, the hovering of the hummingbird, the swoop of the pelican. He would do them all, every kind of wing motion. Soon.

Ah, what glory.

Every time an angel earned his wings, a bell rang. The Little Angel of Learning would keep his ears peeled for his special bell.

Soon soon soon.

Telephones

Nick lined up slices of bread in two rows across the kitchen table. He glanced at the clock. 11:50. In just ten minutes the guys would start arriving at his house. They took turns making lunch for the whole group each Sunday. Then they'd all run over to the soccer field together for a hard practice. Today was Nick's Sunday to make lunch.

Did everyone like mustard? Maybe not Graham. Or Jack, either. They always seemed to complain about something in the food. Hmmm. Well, everyone liked butter. Nick spread each slice of the bread thickly with butter. Then he layered on the cheese, lettuce, and tomato.

"Yum," said Mommy. "Those look great." She leaned against the refrigerator with the

phone in her hand. "I'm on hold," she whispered. "There's a jar of pickle chips in the door." She opened the fridge.

Nick found the jar and dumped the pickles into a bowl. It was easier to reach the pieces that way. "Thanks," he said. He closed the sandwiches and put a single pickle chip on the top of each one. That made better sense than putting the pickles inside the sandwiches; if people didn't like pickles, they could pick the little chip off before they started eating.

An old soccer ball rolled into the kitchen. Megan came running in after it.

"No kicking balls in the house, Megan," said Mommy.

"Nick does it all the time." Megan sat down at the table across from Nick.

Nick looked at his little sister. He was trying very hard to teach her about life. But she never quite got it. "You're not supposed to tattle, Megan."

“Can I have a sandwich?”

“I made just the right number,” said Nick.

“They look really good.” Megan clasped her hands together and leaned forward over the sandwiches. “The pickles are a perfect touch.”

“Oh, all right.” Nick put a sandwich on the table in front of Megan. Then he took out two more slices of bread and worked on another sandwich.

“I can’t stand waiting like this.” Mommy held the phone tight between her ear and her shoulder and scratched her arm.

“Do you know how phones work?” Nick asked Megan.

“You pick them up when they ring,” Megan said with a mouth full of sandwich.

“I mean more than that. Mommy, do you know how phones work?”

Mommy took the phone in her hand and looked at it briefly before holding it to her ear again. “Not exactly.”

“Well,” said Nick, “there’s a little tape recorder right inside the part you speak into.”

“The mouthpiece,” said Mommy.

“Right inside the mouthpiece. And it records what you say really loud so these other tape recorders at the top of telephone poles can hear it through the telephone wires. . .”

“Telephone poles have tape recorders on the top?” said Megan.

“Sure.” Nick went to the window. “See there?” He pointed. “See that box on the side of the pole way up high?”

Megan went to the window. “Ah.”

Mommy followed them, stretching the phone wire out behind her. “That’s a transformer,” she said.

“Do you know what transformers do?” asked Nick.

“Not exactly,” said Mommy, “but—”

“Well, they call them transformers



because they transform the tape recording from the first tiny tape recorder in the phone mouthpiece into a new tape recording that's loud again. Because the first recording, even though it was loud to start with, is heard softly by the transformer tape recorder, since it's so far away and since the phone wires are so small."

Mommy's face went slack. "What are you talking about?"

"The phone system. Telephones. How they work. And it's all the same from there on."

"What's all the same?" said Megan.

"It's just more and more tape recorders. See?" Nick pointed to another transformer across the street. "They're all over the place. Then the person on the other end finally hears what you said from another tiny tape recorder in the hearing part of the phone."

"The earpiece," said Mommy.

"The earpiece."

"Nick," Mommy said very gently, "how

could we talk at a normal pace if we had to wait for all those tape recordings between us and the people we were talking to?”

“They’re fast.”

“But, honey, we talk to Grandma all the way across the country.”

“They’re supersonic. Want me to explain about supersonics?”

“No,” Mommy said quickly. “Not right now. Your friends will be here any minute, anyway. Plus, the people on the other end of this phone line aren’t going to keep me on hold forever.”

“Maybe their tape recorder is just too slow,” said Nick. “You never know.” He loaded the sandwiches onto a platter and carried it into the dining room.

“You never know,” Megan said, following him.

Angel Talk

The Little Angel of Learning stood on his left foot, with the other leg bent so that his right foot rested against the thigh of his standing leg. His arms stretched high over his head with his palms pressed together. This was one of his favorite *asanas*. The Archangel of Learning stood beside him in the same pose. They were like a pair of trees.

"What a liar," said the little angel.

"What?" The archangel wobbled briefly.
"What do you mean?"

"Not a single thing Nick said about telephones was true."

"That doesn't make him a liar."

"It doesn't?" The little angel put both feet

on the ground. "What definition of 'liar' are you using?"

The Archangel of Learning laughed. "I agree that what he said was false. But don't you think it's possible to say false things without lying?"

"Of course," said the little angel. "Anyone can make a mistake. But Nick wasn't making a mistake. He was making things up. I'm going to have to get out a book on lying."

"Hmmm. Come on, little angel. Is making things up always a lie?"

The little angel snorted in exasperation. "Of course not. When you make up a story for fun, that's not lying. But Nick wasn't making up a story."

"Exactly what was he doing?" asked the archangel.

The little angel frowned. "I'm not really sure anymore."

"Then I think you've found your starting point," said the archangel, slowly coming out

of his tree pose. "You need to figure out Nick's problem before you can help him solve it."

"I'm going to get out a bunch of psychology books," said the little angel. "Books always hold answers."

Cards

Mud squished up the sides of Nick's shoes. Last night's rain had ruined the soccer field.

"Yuck," said Carlos. "We're going to fall all over the place."

"Good idea," said Bill. "We can play tackle soccer—with real tackles. We can slide on our stomachs and grab each other around the ankles."

"That's football," said Carlos. "My mother won't let me play football. Plus, tackling's illegal in soccer."

"That's how they play soccer in Australia," said Nick.

"What?" said Manuel.

Nick's heart beat faster. Everyone was looking at him. "Does anyone know anything about Australia?"

“They have kangaroos,” said Ken.

“Yup. And that’s why they play soccer the way they do. They mimic the kangaroos,” said Nick. “All their rules are different. They—”

“You’re nuts,” said Ken. “What, do you think they hop when they get a goal?”

Everyone laughed.

“Stupid,” muttered Ken.

It wouldn’t be so stupid to hop, thought Nick. It would be fun. But he didn’t want to argue with Ken.

“Come on,” said Ken, “let’s just play soccer. Regular rules.” He threw the soccer ball up in the air and headed it when it came down.

The guys divided up into sides and played hard for a long time.

“Time out!” shouted Manuel. “Bill pushed me. That’s a foul. Out of the game, Bill. You get a red card.”

“A red card? For a little push? No way,”



said Bill. "You weren't about to make a goal."

"Give him a yellow card," said Ken.

"Even a yellow card is too much," said Bill. "We weren't anywhere near the goal-post."

"He can get a purple card," said Nick.

"Purple?" Manuel rubbed his shoulder where Bill had pushed him. "Who ever heard of a purple card?"

All eyes were on Nick again. "Purple means a foul that's not as bad as yellow, but worse than just a whistle."

"There is no such thing as a purple card," said Bill.

"Sure there is." Nick breathed hard. "They use it lots of places."

"Like where?" asked Ken. "Australia?"

Everyone laughed.

"He's nuts," said Ken. "Forget the cards. Just don't foul. Let's finish the game."

Nick ran to his position. He would play

hard and try to ignore everything else.

But he kept thinking about Australia, and purple cards, and people laughing at him.

Angel Talk

What's the matter with him?" asked the Little Angel of Learning. He bent over from the hips and let his head and arms fall loose toward the ground. "Does he want people to make fun of him?"

The Archangel of Learning was bent over beside the little angel. He turned his head. "What makes you ask that?"

"Most liars try to make up believable things. That's the whole point of lying—to get people to believe you. That's what my books say. But Nick says things no one would believe."

The archangel put both palms flat on the ground and stretched his neck till he was look-

ing straight ahead. "Maybe Nick thinks people will believe him."

"How could he?" the little angel asked, mimicking the pose of the archangel.

"That's for you to find out," said the archangel.

Russian Art

Nick spread a sheet of newspaper on the floor and plopped his sneakers in the middle of it. Then he worked at picking off the caked mud.

“Hurry up,” said Megan. “The museum opens in a half hour. And Mommy’s afraid she’ll have trouble finding a parking space.”

“I never should have worn my school shoes to soccer practice,” said Nick. “Oh, well.” He banged the bottom of the shoes together, and a few more mud clumps fell off. Then he put the shoes on. He didn’t want to hold them up. This was one of those Mondays when the teachers had an in-service day. That meant the teachers had meetings all day and the kids didn’t have school. So the art museum was offering special programs

for kids. On the last in-service day, the science museum had offered special programs all about the weather. Nick had loved the part on hurricanes. "I'm ready," he said.

They ran out to the car and soon they were standing in line at the art museum.

"You've got a choice of programs," said Mommy. "'Ways of Painting,' or 'Types of Printing.'"

"I love painting," said Megan. "And I'm bad at printing."

"This isn't like school printing," said Mommy.

"Do we get to do things in the programs? Actually paint or actually print?" said Nick. "Or is it just listening to them talk?"

"It's just listening," said Mommy.

"Then I don't care which we do." Nick pursed his lips. "Neither one is as good as hurricanes."

"Painting it is, then." Mommy bought the tickets, and in they went.

A tall lady with a long, skinny face beckoned for their group to bunch together.

"She looks like a vampire," Nick whispered to Megan.

Megan moved closer to Mommy.

The lady smiled. "I'm Mrs. Amity, your docent for today. We're going to walk from one painting to another, and I'll ask you questions about it. Then I'll tell you certain things. Does anyone have any questions before we start?" Mrs. Amity looked around.

The group all looked at each other. No one raised a hand.

"All right." Mrs. Amity led the way down a corridor and into a room with lots of paintings set up on easels. She stopped in front of the first one on the left. "Take a good look."

A woman in a white robe with a bird flying over her head filled the canvas. Her hands lay crisscrossed on her chest, and her eyes were closed. She seemed to be in a fancy room with tall windows behind her.

“What can you tell me about this painting?” Mrs. Amity smiled encouragingly.

“There’s mud behind the woman,” said a boy.

Some of the kids laughed. The boy’s mother pulled him toward her.

“That’s a very good point,” said Mrs. Amity. “This painting is done with tempera made of ground-up color pigments in egg yolk. So the dark colors seem muddy. And you can’t blend the colors smoothly, so you don’t get a nice progression of colors. This artist enjoyed that, actually. Lots of the artists in Holland during this period enjoyed that. See what a striking interruption the bird is?” Mrs. Amity walked to the next painting. “Now look at this one in contrast.”

Nick stared at the picture. A man with a red cloth wrapped around his head stared back at him. Everything about this painting seemed richer and fuller than the last one.

“Who has something to say about this one?”

“He looks mean,” said a girl.

Some of the kids laughed again.

The girl pouted. “Well, he does. He looks thick, too.”

“Another good point,” said Mrs. Amity. “This painting is in oil. The tones are more refined, so the artist can make details stand out. And he can even give expression to the eyes—a mean expression here, I agree. And the thickness is because oil paints are viscous—gummy—so you can make a thin layer or you can build up layer upon layer. This artist wanted us to feel the skin and cloth in his painting.”

They went from painting to painting like that, with Mrs. Amity saying that each child’s comment was another good point—so that after a while no one laughed at what anyone else said, no matter how crazy it was. The pictures were all done in different types of

paints or on different types of material.

“This is our last picture,” said Mrs. Amity. “It’s another silk screen. But this one is Japanese, not Chinese. Who would like to say something about it?”

Nick hadn’t talked at all yet, even though almost every other kid had. Even Megan had said something about a weird picture that was made up of lots of dots. Nick cleared his throat. “In Russia they have special silk screens that don’t soak up the paint.”

Mrs. Amity blinked. “Russia?”

“And they have special paintbrushes, too. The brushes have a regular paintbrush on one end and a special eraser on the other. So if the artist makes a mistake, he can just erase. And because the paint doesn’t soak in, the eraser can do a good job. It looks clean afterward.”

“He’s making that up,” said a boy at the back of the group.

Nick’s cheeks got hot.

“Shh. Please don’t interrupt.” Mrs. Amity’s hands fluttered around. She suddenly folded them in front of her waist.

“And only the best artists are allowed to use these brushes. Only the masters.”

The boy laughed.

Nick pressed his lips together and swallowed.

Mrs. Amity waited a minute. “Are you finished?” she asked weakly.

Nick nodded.

“Well, that’s all for today, children.”

“But you didn’t say anything about Japanese silk screens,” said a girl.

“You can read about them in your pamphlet.” Mrs. Amity handed everyone a pamphlet. “Now you’re free to wander through the museum.”

“Come with me,” Mommy whispered to Nick and Megan. She walked up to Mrs. Amity. “I’m sorry Nick interrupted you with all that nonsense.”



Mrs. Amity smiled. "He's got a good imagination. Don't do anything to squash it."

Mommy nodded. "Thank you. You're very kind."

Angel Talk

*H*e's a novel case," said the little angel.

The Archangel of Learning inserted a finger between each of his toes on both feet. "A novel psychology case?"

"Yes." The little angel thought of the tension in Nick's face when the boy in the art museum had laughed at him. He sighed heavily, took off his shoes, and sat on the floor beside the archangel. He put his fingers between his toes, too. "This feels good."

"Space between the toes helps you breathe," said the archangel.

"How can it?" The Little Angel of Learning wrinkled his brow at the idea. "Our lungs are responsible for breathing."

The Archangel of Learning laughed. "Without our lungs we can't breathe, that's the truth. But many parts of us can help in breathing."

"What book taught you that?" asked the little angel.

"No book. Just yoga." The archangel closed his eyes.

The little angel watched the archangel. His chest did seem to rise more fully with each breath now. And the rhythm of his breath was slower and somehow softer. The little angel closed his own eyes and concentrated on his own breath. Air in. Air out.

After a while he heard a rustling. The little angel opened his eyes to find that the archangel was watching him. "I feel refreshed," said the little angel.

"You were breathing better," said the archangel.

The little angel took his fingers away from his feet and wiggled his toes. "Nick really does

need help. Now strangers are laughing at him, too. I want to help him, but I don't know what to do. That Mrs. Amity said it's his imagination. But none of the books I've read tell about anything quite like this."

"Maybe you'll have to do without a book this time."

The Little Angel of Learning looked at his toes. Could he help Nick without directions from a book? His toes went cold.

Keys

Mommy took Nick and Megan out to the car. They all stood in the parking lot across from the art museum while Mommy fished around in her purse. "I can't find my keys." She stared down into her purse and moved her hand more quickly.

"Maybe someone stole them," said Megan.

"Oh, where are they?" Mommy made a loud sigh.

"Maybe that Mrs. Amity was a thief as well as a vampire. Yes, I think I saw her looking sneakily at you."

Mommy jerked her head up. "Stop it, Megan. Don't you start spinning stories now. I'm in no mood for that. I've got enough trouble with your brother." Mommy fumbled around in her purse. "Where are

those keys! Oh, I'm so frustrated."

"We could jump-start the car," said Nick. "Do you know how to jump-start, Mommy?"

"What?" Mommy pulled things out of her purse frantically now.

"Well, it just takes a little spark of electricity. See those rocks?" Nick ran over to the edge of the parking lot and picked up two rocks. "We can smack them together till they spark. See any wire, Megan? If we had wire, we could attach it to the slot where the key goes in and—"

"The ignition," barked Mommy. "It's called the ignition." She shook her finger at Nick. "You're always talking about things, talking and talking, and you don't even know the names of them. You sound like a nut. Oh, Nick, I've been meaning to talk to you for a long time. This morning is the last straw. You'd better not ever do this again."

"What?" said Nick. "I didn't take your keys."

“You know what I mean. That stunt you pulled in the museum. Saying all those ridiculous things about Russia.”

Ridiculous? Nick felt sick.

“Mrs. Amity told you not to squash him,” said Megan.

“Hush, Megan. Nick, you can’t say things like that.”

“Why not?” said Nick.

“People can’t just go around making up any old thing they want.”

“But she was making up all those things about Holland and China and everywhere.”

Mommy gasped. “No, she wasn’t.”

“Then how did she know them? She said the pictures were painted long ago. And she’s not that old. Plus, she couldn’t have gone to all the places she talked about. She made it all up.”

“No, she didn’t,” said Mommy. “She knows a lot.”

“Yes, she did. Everyone makes things up. If

I don't make things up, too, I'll just stand around silent like a dummy."

"Oh, Nicky. You're so wrong. We've got to have a good talk. Here they are!" Mommy pulled out her keys. "Get in the car fast."

Nick let Megan take the front seat, while he sat in the back. He didn't want to be near Mommy if she was going to pick on him the whole way home.

Mommy was wrong: He didn't sound like a nut. He didn't.

Angel Talk

What a goof Nick is," said the Little Angel of Learning. "He thinks no one knows anything."

"You were lucky," said the archangel. "That little burst of anger from Nick's mother, even though it was so regrettable, did you a favor in an odd way. Now you know Nick's problem."

"It wasn't luck," said the little angel. "It happened because of the car keys, and the car keys happened because of me."

The archangel gaped. "You stole her car keys?"

"I just hid them for a little while."

"But why?"

"I wanted Nick's mother to talk to him about the way he makes things up."

“I don’t follow that reasoning at all,” said the Archangel of Learning, “not at all.”

The little angel held his hands turned up to the sky. “I wanted the mother to get annoyed enough to be able to face unpleasant things. That’s how people are. They like to avoid unpleasant things for as long as possible. But when they’re irritated, they face up.”

“How did you figure that out?”

“I read it in the psychology books.”

The archangel gave a little humph. “Exactly what did Nick’s mother have to face up to?”

“Nick, of course. She just kept letting Nick make up things. She knew she should stop him. But it wasn’t until I hid her keys that she felt grumpy enough to finally have a talk with him.”

The archangel shook his head. “Well, I don’t like what happened. But it is good that his mother is going to help him. And now you can see your starting point.”

“Zero is my starting point. This kid thinks

people go around making things up. So he makes things up—crazy things—so he can be like everyone else. He probably doesn't even know how to read."

"What does reading have to do with it?" The Archangel of Learning laced his fingers together, then straightened his arms out in front of him, turning his palms away from his chest. His knuckles cracked loudly.

"Reading is how you learn things. Then you have real things to talk about." The little angel moved so that he was standing right beside the archangel. He stretched his arms out, too, doing the *asana* exactly like the archangel. This felt great on his wrists and shoulders.

"Reading is just one of the ways you learn things. Mrs. Amity figured out Nick simply by listening to him. Anyway, Nick can read."

"How do you know?"

"Go look in his bedroom. It's full of comic books."

"Comic books?" The Little Angel of



Learning dropped his hands. "That's not real reading. That's junk."

"Don't be such a snob, little angel. Comic books can have exciting fantasy stories. And they have some of the best artwork around."

"Fantasy. Ha," said the little angel in disgust. "That's why Nick doesn't know anything. All he reads is fantasy. If you want to really learn something, you have to read good books."

"Whoa! Who says Nick doesn't know anything?"

"You heard him. He's a dolt."

The Archangel of Learning drummed his fingers quick and fluttery on his lips. "Now what book taught you to make such quick judgments, I wonder."

The little angel opened his mouth to protest, then shut it. No book he'd ever read suggested quick judgments. And it wasn't kind to make judgments like that, whether quick or slow. "I didn't really mean to be nasty," he said quietly.

"I know," the archangel said just as quietly.

"But comic books bother me. There are so many good books to read, and here's this boy Nick wasting his time on comic books. Nick, who needs real books more than just about anyone I've ever seen."

"There's lots of time in the day, little angel. Time for all kinds of things."

"My first job, then, is to get Nick to take the time to open a decent—no, I mean a different—kind of book. A book he can learn some facts from."

"You're certainly stubborn about books," said the archangel. "But I have to admit that's not a bad place to start."

Broken

Drip, drip. Nick peeked into the bathroom. The sink faucet had a slow leak. He went in and turned it to the right. Oh, no. Water gushed from the faucet. “Papi!” shouted Nick. He stuck his finger up the faucet, but his finger was too small. He tried his thumb. Water still leaked past. “Papi!”

With his free hand, Nick reached into his pocket for his Bubble Yum. But he couldn’t upwrap them with one hand. So he took his thumb out of the faucet, unwrapped the whole pack, stuffed them in his mouth, and chewed hard. When he had a good wad, he shoved it into the faucet. It stopped the water, but only as long as he held it there. If he let go, the water pushed the gob free.

“Papi!” shouted Nick again. He threw the

gum in the trash and ran to look for his father.

“Papi took Megan to buy school supplies,” Mommy called from upstairs. “What’s the matter, Nick?”

Nick ran up the stairs. The light was on in his parents’ bathroom, and the door was open. “Mommy?”

“Come on in. I’m dyeing my hair.” Mommy was kneeling on the floor in her old clothes, the ones she always wore when she did things that might stain them. She hung her head over the tub. A plastic shower cap covered her hair. “It’s just about time for me to rinse.”

“I broke the downstairs bathroom faucet. Water’s running like mad.”

“Under the sink there’s a knob. Turn that clockwise all the way. That’ll shut off the water. As soon as I finish up here, I’ll come take a look.”

Nick ran back downstairs and shut off the water in the sink. He went into the living

room and paced. Why had the faucet broken just like that? And he hated the fact that he hadn't been able to stop the water on his own. Plus, why did Papi and Megan go shopping without him? Nick could always use new school supplies.

It was late—almost time for bed. Papi and Megan should be pulling into the driveway any minute. Nick went to the window and gave the shade a sharp tug. It came crashing down. “Yikes!” Nick jumped back.

He picked up the shade. Then he brought over a chair and climbed from the chair to the windowsill. He fit the shade back into the little holders on each side of the window. He got down and tugged on the bottom of the shade again. It crashed.

Mommy came in. “What’s the matter now? Oh, what happened to the shade?”

“All I did was pull on it like normal, and it fell down. And all I did to the faucet was turn it off like normal. I’m breaking everything.”

Mommy laughed. "Don't worry. You're just unlucky tonight. The faucet needs a new washer." Mommy picked up the shade and examined it. "And the spring on this shaft is broken. See?" Mommy jiggled the loose spring. "It wasn't your fault."

Nick didn't know what a washer was. And he didn't understand what the broken spring had to do with the shade falling down. Everything was stupid and annoying. He went into his bedroom.

Comics were strewn across his covers, but in the middle lay a book. Nick read the title: *The Way Things Work*. Well, that wasn't his book. And it was way too hard for Megan to read. Papi must have left it there. Nick put the book on the floor and stretched out on his bed, right on top of the pile of comic books. He opened one with a green alien on the cover and read.

"Hey, Nick. Look what Papi bought me." Megan came in holding a small accordion, her



hands wrapped around it from the rear.

“Cool. Can I try it?”

“Okay, but be careful.”

Nick carefully touched the little white buttons on the right side and all the bright shiny keys on the left side. Then he gripped it from behind the way Megan had and he pushed it together, then pulled it apart.

No sound came out.

“You broke it,” said Megan. “I just got it, and you broke it.”

Nick handed Megan the accordion. “Take it away.”

“Fix it first. Please, Nicky.”

“I don’t know how it works.”

“You know how everything works,” said Megan.

Nick thought about the long lecture Mommy had given him in the car on the way home from the museum. She had said people studied for years and years in order to do their jobs the right away.

Nick hadn't studied anything for years and years. And the boys on the soccer field had laughed at him. And the boy in the museum had laughed at him. He'd die if Megan laughed at him. If he couldn't say something correct, then he'd just have to say nothing, no matter how stupid it made him look.

He pushed Megan out of the room. "I don't know what a washer is, and I don't know how a spring makes the shade work, and I hate your accordion."

Megan looked up at him with big, shocked eyes and an open mouth.

He shut the door in her face.

Angel Talk

So many broken things in a row." The Archangel of Learning put his face down in front of the little angel's face. "Did you have something to do with that sink washer?"

The little angel stood with his feet stretched far apart, his right foot turned outward and his left foot turned inward. He was bending to the right from the waist, as far as he could, balancing by putting his right hand on the floor behind his right foot. This yoga pose was called *utthika trikonasana*, and it took a lot of concentration. "Is there a straight line from my left shoulder down to my left heel?"

The archangel pushed the little angel's left shoulder back gently, and pulled his right

shoulder a tiny bit forward. "That's better. Now, please answer my question."

"Of course I had something to do with the washer. I broke it partway so that when Nick turned off the faucet, it broke completely."

"And the shade?"

"Yup, I broke the spring so that it wouldn't wind back up when he yanked on it. Instead, all he did was force it out of the little sprockets that held it up."

"And the accordion?"

"Well, that wasn't actually broken. I just pushed the little button on the side that blocks air from coming in and out. That button's only found on toy accordions, so that parents can save their sanity if their children start playing it night and day."

"Please come out of that pose right now."

The little angel straightened up and jumped his feet back together. "How come?"

The Archangel of Learning's eyes flashed. "You are destructive."

"A washer is no big deal. Neither is a spring. Nick's mother said they'd fix them by tomorrow night."

"That doesn't matter. It's wrong to break things. And you frustrated Nick."

"That was the point," said the Little Angel of Learning. "I told you that before—when people are frustrated, they face their problems."

"Is that your method of helping people?" asked the archangel. "Frustration?"

"For this problem, yes. I've never been without the help of a book before—so I had to make up my own method." The little angel smiled. "New methods are fun."

"I don't like it."

"But it worked on Nick's mother with the car keys," said the little angel. "And I just bet it will work on Nick."

"Nick went to bed depressed. I don't call that 'working,' little angel."

The little angel remembered the look on

Nick's face as he had turned out his bedside lamp. The boy was clearly unhappy. "That's not the only thing I did," the little angel said defensively. "I was the one who put that book on his bed."

"I figured that. It looks like an interesting book."

"It is." That was one of the Little Angel of Learning's favorite books. It explained all the things that Nick would love to know. "I can lighten up on the frustration part," he said slowly.

"Good."

"I'll find a way to get Nick to open up that book—a way that won't make him unhappy."

"Now you're back on track." The archangel took a big breath in and gave a happy sigh as he breathed out. "Shall we do some relaxation stretches before bed?"

"You lead the way."

Time

The alarm rang. Nick reached out and pressed the off button. He lay there for a while, considering the clock. Then he sat up.

That alarm clock had woken him every school morning since his birthday last year, when Papi had given it to him. He picked it up and turned it over. With his thumbnail, he opened a small rectangle and took out a battery. But the black plastic casing on the back of the clock gave no information about what else was inside it. It was a quartz clock—Nick remembered Papi saying that—but he realized now that he knew nothing about how this clock or any other clock worked.

He carried the clock outside to the garage, to the big old tool cabinet. Among all the screws and bolts and little pipes of various

sizes, Nick found just the right screwdriver—a skinny Phillips. Within a few minutes, the entire back came off the clock. He moved his fingers lightly over a spring and several wires. Then he turned a gear.

“Nick?”

Nick jerked at the sound of Mommy’s voice. The gear he’d been turning popped off and fell on the ground. Nick bent over to pick it up, and another gear fell out. And another.

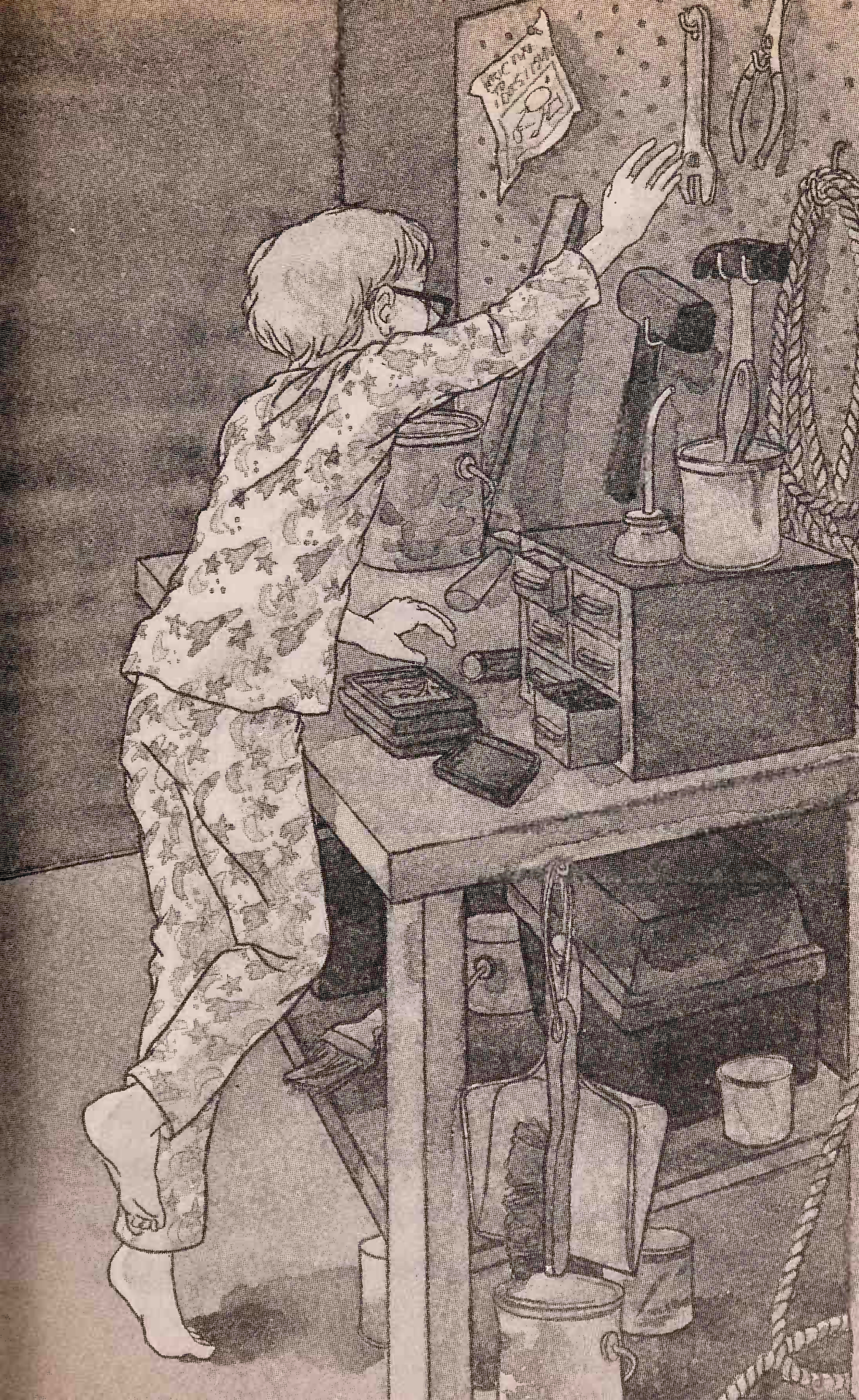
“Nick, are you out there?” Mommy stood on the back steps.

Nick put the clock and the three gears that had fallen out on the top of the toolbox and went to Mommy. “Hi.”

“What on earth are you doing outside in your pajamas?”

Nick thought of the clock in pieces. It wasn’t the best idea to answer Mommy’s question. “I’m hungry.”

Mommy lowered her brows. “Hungry? That’s why you were in the garage?” She



looked bewildered. "Get your clothes on and I'll make a nice breakfast."

Nick dressed and brushed his teeth. As he was passing his bedroom door on the way to the kitchen, he noticed that a book was lying open on his floor with the pages flipping. He went in the bedroom. The windows were open, but there was no breeze. The pages of the book lay quiet now. Nick sucked his breath in fast. At the top of the open page it said "quartz clock". Below it were lots of words, and then a wonderful diagram of the inside of a clock. The parts of the diagram were labeled. There were all those gears, just like in his alarm clock. And the thing he'd thought was a spring was really a coil to receive control signals. Control signals from where? Nick got on his knees and read.

"My accordion's working again." Megan peeked in from the hallway.

Nick smiled at her. "Good. Let me hear."

Megan squished the accordion, then

stretched it. An awful noise came out. She grinned.

Nick sat back on his heels. "That's nice. I wonder what was wrong with it last night." He held his hand out toward the accordion.

Megan turned sideways, pulling the accordion away from Nick's reaching fingers. Her face pinched in worry. "It doesn't matter now. It works. I have to go put it back in my bedroom. See you at breakfast." She ran off.

Nick turned the pages of the book, looking for accordions. Windmills caught his eye. There were all sorts on the pages, and, unlike with the clocks, some of them were super simple. You needed blades, something to mount the blades on that would allow them to rotate, and a post to put the rotating mount on.

Nick opened the top drawer of his bureau. Lying across the front of it, under his T-shirts, was the giant pencil that he'd won at a carnival last summer. It was over two feet long and

so thick that his fingers could barely close around it. The pencil tip was sharp, and if he jammed it into the ground, it could stand by itself, he was sure. The eraser was big, big enough to drill a hole through, so that a little pipe, like the ones in the tool cabinet, could fit inside it. Then some sort of rotating mount could be fitted onto that pipe. Ha. This pencil was the perfect post for a windmill.

Nick ran out to the garage again, carrying the giant pencil in one hand and the book in the other. He found a bolt long enough to pass through the eraser. Then he found a little pipe that the bolt fit into, so that when he turned the bolt, it spun easily within the pipe. With the screwdriver, he made a long hole through the eraser. He slid in the bolt and secured it on the other end with a nut. Now he had his post and his rotating mount. All he needed were blades to attach to the tip of the bolt.

“Breakfast,” called Mommy. “Where are you kids?”

Nick would just have to finish after school. He picked up the book and carried it to the kitchen, reading all the way.

Mommy put a big slice of Dutch pancake on Nick's plate. That was Nick's favorite. He lay the book on the table beside his plate and ate. "Yum. Thanks, Mommy."

"What's your book about?"

"Everything."

Mommy nodded. "Everything, huh? Sounds like something we should all read."

"The words are too small for me," said Megan.

"Don't forget that Papi's picking you up from school early today," said Mommy. "You've got dentist appointments. Here are the notes for your teachers." She put an envelope beside Megan's plate and another one beside Nick's.

"Do you know how a dentist's drill works?" said Nick. "It's nothing but a windmill. It—"

"Nick!" Mommy put her hands on his hips.

“We had a long talk just yesterday. And you said you understood. And here you are making up stories again.”

“Look.” Nick turned his book so that Mommy could see. He pointed to the dentist’s drill on the bottom right-hand side of the page.

Mommy read. “You’re right,” she said at last. “A dentist’s drill is a miniature windmill. How strange. That’s as crazy as any story you could have made up.” She touched Nick’s cheek. “I’m sorry I accused you.”

“See?” said Megan. “You do know how everything works.”

The praise felt good. But it wasn’t deserved—not yet. “No I don’t,” said Nick. “But I’m going to learn how lots of things work. Lots and lots of things.”

Angel Talk

It certainly didn't take much to get Nick interested in that book." The Archangel of Learning rubbed his hands together noisily and let out a satisfied *ah*. "I think this job is just about done."

"It'll never be done," said the little angel. He slapped the book on his lap shut.

"Is that Nick's book? I thought he took his to school with him."

"He did," said the little angel. "So I went to the library for another copy. But it doesn't help. I can't get it."

"What are you talking about?" The archangel plopped down on the floor beside the little angel. "You can't get what?"

"This clock." The little angel lifted up the



book so that the archangel could see the pile of clock pieces in his lap.

“Is that Nick’s clock?”

“Yes.”

“You took Nick’s clock apart?” said the archangel.

“I didn’t mean to,” said the little angel. “Not at first, at least. I just wanted to see if I could get those gears back in place. But then everything kept popping every which way. So I decided to take all the pieces out and rebuild it from the beginning. After all, this book shows exactly how it should work.”

The Archangel of Learning picked up the book and turned to the page on clocks. “Hmmm. Yes, this diagram is pretty complete.”

“Complete, but not very helpful.”

“What do you mean?” said the archangel.

“The diagram makes it all look so simple. But the gears have to fit together just so, and the motor has to be mounted just right, and all the wires to the little microchip are delicate

and the smallest jerk of my hand makes them come off these pieces here, and I hate it. I hate this clock and I hate this book.”

The archangel set the book open on the floor in front of them. “Shall we try it together?”

“If you’ve got the time.”

The Archangel of Learning smiled. “Like I said, there’s time for all kinds of things.”

“I don’t know about that,” said the little angel. “If we fix this clock, we won’t have time left for yoga today.”

“Fixing this clock is a kind of yoga, little angel. How about if I hold the motor in place in the middle of the electromagnet while you put the gears in order?”

The little angel carefully fit the teeth of the various gears together. “It’s a lot easier when you’re helping. The book really ought to tell you to work with a partner. And it ought to tell you to set the motor in place before fooling around with the gears.”

“And here I thought you said books could tell you everything,” said the archangel with a light tease to his voice.

“They can. It’s just that this book sure doesn’t.” The Little Angel of Learning surveyed their work. “Oh, dear. We have to take it apart again, so I can put the coil around one side of the electromagnet before you put the motor in place. Then I’ll put the gears back, and we can go on from there.”

“Sounds like you’ve got it figured out this time.”

“I think I do,” said the little angel. He quickly dismantled the gears.

“So, really, little angel, do you think the book should have told us everything? Do you think it should have told us to put the coil on first and then the motor and then the gears? Step by step.”

The little angel thought about that. If the book had told everything, he would have fixed the clock by himself long ago. But then he

wouldn't have had the pleasure of realizing for himself the best way to do it. And he wouldn't have had the pleasure of being partners with the archangel. The little angel laughed. "Okay, you win. I admit it's more fun this way. But books are still terrific."

"You'll get no argument from me there," said the archangel. "Now we just have to make sure that Nick understands that, too."

"Let's just finish this clock," said the little angel, "and then I'll get back to Nick."

Mirrors and Horns

“Hey, Papi, when you look in your shaving mirror at home, you just see yourself and the stuff right around you. But when you look in your car mirror, you see stuff way off to the sides.” Nick buckled his seat belt and checked Megan’s. “Do you know why?”

“What?” said Papi.

“Do you know why your driving mirror is different from your shaving mirror?”

“So he won’t crash,” said Megan.

“Well, sure,” said Nick. “But do you know why it works the way it works?”

“I never thought about it,” Papi said, pulling out of the dentist’s parking lot.

“It’s because your shaving mirror is flat, so the sun’s rays bounce off it at the same angle that they meet it. So when you look in a mirror,

it's like looking at something directly behind the mirror. But your driving mirror is curved, with the middle closer to you than the edges."

"Convex," said Papi.

"Yup, that's the right word," said Nick. "I didn't use it because I couldn't remember it. Anyway, the sun's rays hit it at a different angle from the angle they bounce off it. So you see a wider field of view."

"I don't understand," said Megan.

"Want me to draw you a diagram?" asked Nick.

"No," said Megan.

"But I can explain it," said Nick. "I can show you everything I learned from my book."

"You did nothing but read that stupid book all the way to the dentist and the whole time we sat in the waiting room. Now you want to torture me with it. I want ice cream," said Megan. "I had no cavities."

I want ice cream. Mocha chip.”

Mocha chip? Nick had heard of that flavor before, but he didn’t know what it was. How had his little sister not only found out, but tasted it? He looked at Megan. She was busily scratching her knee. She didn’t realize that Nick didn’t know what mocha chip was. And he just bet she wouldn’t think bad of him if she knew. He kissed her on the cheek.

“Thanks,” said Megan. “Why’d you do that?”

“What’s mocha chip?”

“Oh, it’s good. Coffee with chocolate chips. You can taste mine.”

The car next to them swerved over. Papi beeped the horn. The car went back into its own lane.

“Do you know how a car horn works?” asked Nick.

Papi pulled off the road and into the parking lot of the ice-cream shop. “I do have some idea about that. But why don’t you refresh my

memory over a nice ice-cream cone.”

“I don’t know how horns work,” said Nick. “I was asking so you could teach me.”

“Okay,” said Papi. “I’ll tell you while I eat my banana split.”

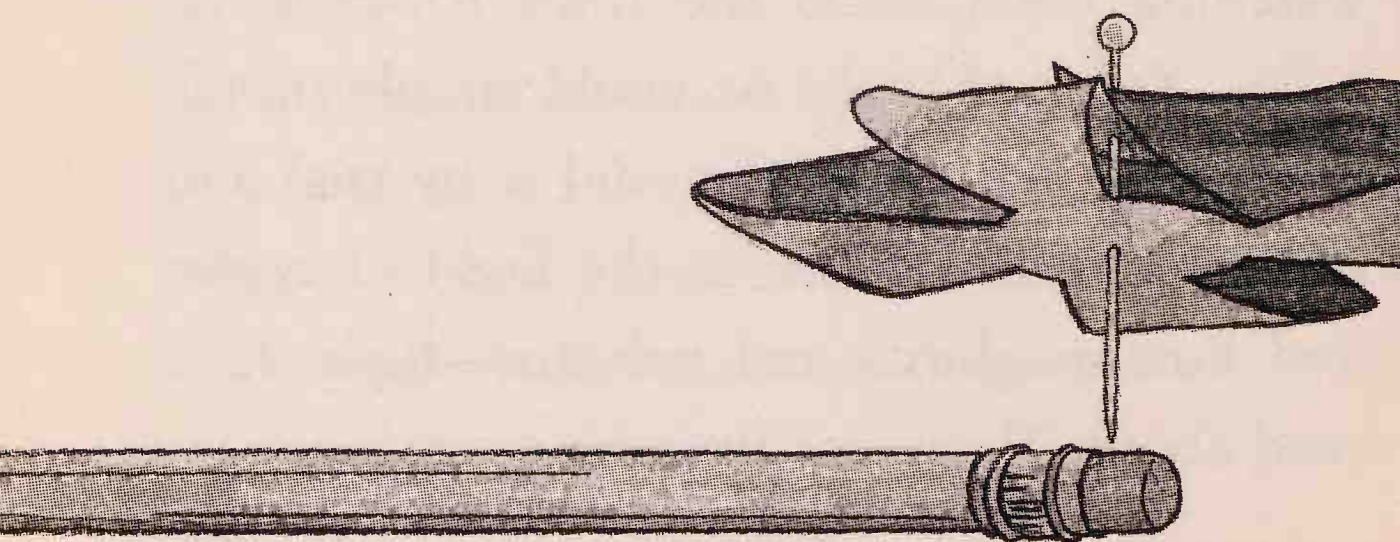
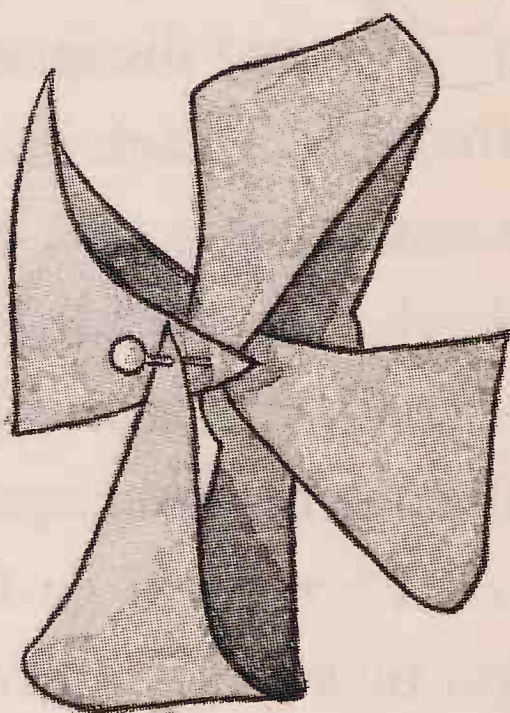
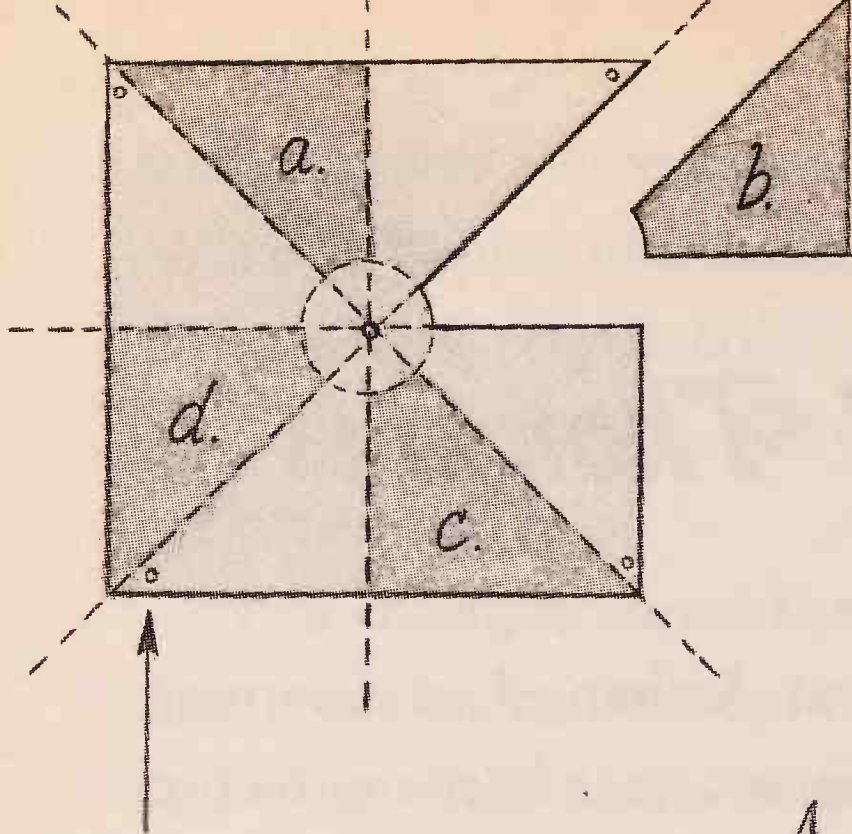
Nick thought about the little paper flags that came in banana splits. He was sure he could rig them up to be good rotors on his windmill. “Can I have a banana split, too?”

“Sure,” said Papi. As he opened the ice-cream shop door, little bells announced their entrance.

Angel Thoughts

The newest Archangel of Learning put the intact clock back on the top of the tool cabinet. Then he carefully took out the same pieces that Nick had left out before and set them beside the clock. He was quite sure that Nick would have no trouble putting it all back together again.

And now he'd go for his first flight. He'd begin by swooping like a swallow. He'd never read about swallows, but he had enjoyed watching them circle the town tower many times. So he thought he could simply mimic them, and learn how they did it by trial and error. Then he'd go on to the flight of eagles and hummingbirds and pelicans—flight he'd read about. There was time for everything.



How to make your own windmill

- 1** On a six-inch square of heavy paper or posterboard, draw out the dotted lines shown, with a circle at the center.
- 2** Cut out every other triangle, being sure to leave the circle intact.
- 3** Place a small hole through the center and at each of the corners of the square.
- 4** Fold the triangles into the center and put a pin with a large head through all the holes.
- 5** Push the pin into the eraser top of a pencil, leaving enough space for the windmill to move freely. The wind will “catch” in each compartment and make the windmill spin.

*Meet the Little Angel of Acceptance in
the next Aladdin Angelwings*

No. 12 New Voices

“Come along, little angel.” The Archangel of Acceptance held out her hand. “It’s time for you to earn the rest of your feathers.”

The Little Angel of Acceptance took the archangel’s hand and smiled up at her from under her broad-brimmed hat. “I can’t wait. Where are we going?”

“To the library.”

“The library?” The little angel dropped the archangel’s hand. “Why?”

“That’s where the child is.”

The Little Angel of Acceptance shook her head. “Uh-uh,” she said.

“What’s all the fuss about?” The archangel tapped the brim of the little angel’s hat. “It isn’t unusual for a child to go to the library.”

“I was just thinking,” the little angel said,

looking at her hands, "I was just thinking that I still have a lot of feathers to earn and a child who hangs around the library is probably pretty cooperative so this will probably be a pretty easy assignment so it would make sense for some little angel who only needs a few more feathers to take this assignment." She took a moment to catch her breath. She looked up at the archangel. "So you'd better pick someone else."

The Archangel of Acceptance smiled. "Don't worry. This will be a tough case; you'll earn a lot of feathers. And it's a very important case. I choose you, little angel."

The Little Angel of Acceptance studied her hands. She cleaned dirt out from under her thumbnail.

The archangel held out her hand again. "Let's go. I can't wait to find out what kind of bell will ring when you get enough feathers to finally earn your wings." She smiled. "I'm sure it will sound lovely."

The little angel wanted to hear that bell ring; she wanted to earn her wings and become an archangel so that she could guide little angels, too. And she did want to help this child—she did. “Can we wait until the child leaves the library?”

The Archangel of Acceptance shook her head. “I thought you liked libraries.”

“Not really.” The little angel smiled uneasily. “I like museums.”

“Maybe you’ll change your mind. Come on. Here we go.”

The little angel closed her eyes and when she opened them, there were shelves and shelves of books all around her. She sidled up against the archangel and looked around for a child in need.

A girl sat on the rug nearby with her knees bent and her ankles crossed. She leaned forward and rested her chin on her palms, her elbows on her thighs. The book in front of her on the floor showed a picture of a tiger with

lots of words below and beside it. The girl turned the page. Another tiger stared out at her.

The little angel moved closer and looked over the girl's shoulder at the fierce, striped face.

The First Librarian

“Time to go, class.” Theodore spoke softly, but his voice carried.

TJ looked up briefly from her book. Theodore stood by the circulation desk and held up his right hand. TJ liked him. He was the only teacher she’d ever had who asked the children to call him by his first name. It made TJ feel almost grown up. Well, she’d just finish this page, then she’d go to him.

Children gathered from all over the library and formed a line in front of Theodore. TJ was aware of them as they whisked by. She knew they were filing past Mrs. Ford, the librarian, and checking out their books. She read faster.

Theodore tapped TJ on the shoulder. “Come on, TJ. Get in line.”

TJ got up, still reading, and joined the end

of the line. She read as the line moved forward. Pretty soon she was at the circulation desk.

Mrs. Ford swatted her ear and looked around. "Is there a bee in here?" Then she shrugged and turned to TJ with a smile. "That must be a pretty good book."

TJ took an index card from her pocket and marked her page. She handed Mrs. Ford her book. "It . . . is," she said, with a pause between the words and an emphasis on the second word.

Mrs. Ford stamped the book and handed it back. "What makes it so good?"

"Tuh-tuh-tuh-tigers," said TJ. "I luh-luh-like tuh-tigers."

The class line broke into groups as they walked the corridor back to their classroom. Patrick fell back beside TJ. "You're a tuh-tuh-tuh-tiger." He talked loudly, and the kids in front of them looked back. Patrick laughed. "She sounds like a tiger, doesn't she?"

“She doesn’t sound like a tiger at all,” said Ari.

“Sure she does,” said Patrick. “Tigers stutter, too. What do you think grrrr is? It’s just one big stutter.”

TJ’s cheeks got hot. She wished she could let out a giant growl and scare Patrick. But she knew that if she tried, all that would come out was guh-guh-guh-grrr.

“Come on, tiger girl. Let’s hear it,” said Patrick.

By now three more kids had their eyes on TJ and Patrick. TJ knew they were there, even though she refused to meet their eyes. Her forehead got hot.

“You’re so stupid,” said Patrick. “Too stupid to even growl.”

TJ bit Patrick. Right on the arm. Just like that. She clamped her teeth down and stayed there.

“Ahhh!” screamed Patrick. “Get her off me. Help.”

Theodore came running. He wrested TJ off Patrick. "TJ! What's the matter with you? And, Patrick, what did you do?"

"Me?" said Patrick. "Don't ask me. TJ bit me." He rubbed at the white teeth marks on his forearm.

"Go on, class," Theodore said to the rest of the kids. "Go on to the classroom and we'll be there in just a moment."

Some of the kids wandered down the corridor. Others stayed put.

Theodore gave a little doubtful snort. "She just bit you?" he asked Patrick, holding each child by the shoulder. "Out of the blue?"

"Out of the blue," said Patrick.

"Tha-tha-tha-that's nuh-nuh-nuh-not true." TJ shook her head violently.

"Well, you did bite him," said Theodore. "You were still attached to his arm when I reached you."

"Buh-buh-buh-but . . . it . . . wuh-wuh-wasn't—"

“It wasn’t out of the blue,” said Ari.

“Patrick teased her,” said Tammy. “Patrick was mean.”

“He made fun of her stuttering,” said Ari.

“No matter how mean someone is, you can’t bite him,” said Theodore. He let go of TJ’s shoulder and lifted her chin up so that she had to look him in the face. “You know better, TJ. Don’t ever let a bully get the best of you. He just wins if you lose control of yourself. Do you see?”

TJ didn’t see. Patrick deserved to be bitten. And now maybe Patrick wouldn’t tease her next time. But TJ nodded, anyway.

Theodore let go of Patrick’s shoulder and lifted his chin up, too. “And you don’t want to be the sort of person who bullies others. You don’t want to make people feel bad.”

“She bit me,” said Patrick.

“I’m not talking about what she did. I’m talking about what you did. You know it wasn’t right, Patrick. Don’t you?”



“Yes.”

“Then don’t hurt people’s feelings. No one likes a bully.” Theodore stepped back. “Okay, now both of you say sorry to the other.”

“TJ first,” said Patrick. “She bit me.”

“Both of you at once, on the count of three. One, two, three.”

“Suh—” said TJ.

“Sorry,” said Patrick.

“Suh-suh-suh-sorry,” said TJ.

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Donna Jo Napoli knows just how it feels to have a problem that you don't think you can solve by yourself. "All of us have problems, some big and some small. And all of us who solve those problems have help, whether we recognize that help or not. If we keep our hearts open, we can help and be helped more easily. I offer these books as a gift to your open heart."

Donna Jo Napoli's books and stories are read all over the world. Her award-winning novels for young readers include *Soccer Shock*, *When the Water Closes Over My Head*, and *The Prince of the Pond*, among many others. She is the head of the linguistics department at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, where she lives with her husband and their children.

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A lot to learn

Nick thinks he can figure out everything on his own. Why should he have to read books when he can make things up himself? It will take an important lesson from the Little Angel of Learning to change his mind.

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